



ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

New England Historic Genealogical Society,

AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING,

JANUARY 4, 1888,

BY

ABNER C. GOODELL, JUNIOR,

On the occasion of his Second Election as President of the Society.

BOSTON :

PRESS OF DAVID CLAPP & SON.

1888.

E
G648
1888₂

CARD
CATALOGUED.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN :

While professing my high appreciation of the honor you have a second time conferred upon me in reëlecting me to the presidency of this Society, and promising to exert myself to the extent of my ability to forward the work of the Society, and to increase its usefulness, I ask you to indulge me in the expression of some thoughts which seem to me appropriate to this occasion.

The custom, in conformity to which, in this country, the presiding officer of a deliberative society is expected to deliver an address to his associates at the beginning of his official term, can be traced, I believe, to the practice of the royal governors before the independence of the American colonies, of communicating to the assemblies of their respective provinces, at the opening of the session, the commands or recommendations of the sovereign or his ministers respecting the course to be pursued by the local authorities in legislative and administrative affairs.

This custom was followed throughout the Revolution by each executive council or individual chief magistrate, whose excogitations given in the form of recommendations took the place of the royal commands in matters of policy, and the scope of whose speech or message was otherwise modified by the changed political situation—being frequently limited to transmitting such facts and suggestions as had been officially communicated to the head of the government and were thought proper to be laid before the legislature. Hence arose a practice which became firmly established in this and other of the confederated states after the severance of our connection with the mother country which these official communications were originally intended to preserve and strengthen, and even after the United States had become a sovereign nation. Political and deliberative bodies generally adopted the practice, which has received

its highest sanction in the National Constitution where it is made the duty of the President, from time to time, to give "to the Congress information of the state of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient."

This view of the monarchical origin of the "opening speech" and the "inaugural," or annual, address or message, explains, I think, why these *quasi* manifestoes are too often pervaded with a spirit of superiority, if not of authority, which ill comports with the crudeness, and sometimes even mischievousness, of the suggestions contained in them.

If this theory of the derivation of the practice is sound—a theory, I may add, not wholly conjectural, but the result of careful observation of the progress of events as shown in the public records—I might, without breach of any obligation, decline the performance of a task which is not expressly required by our constitution and by-laws had not the custom been so long observed by my predecessors; and even admitting the binding force of these precedents, this custom would be "more honored in the breach than the observance" if it should only serve to furnish an occasion for the utterance of trite generalities or an opportunity for a display of dogmatism and dictation.

The topics proper to be discussed by the chair at our annual meetings are limited by the admirable distribution of duties provided for by our by-laws, which, according to invariable usage, makes it incumbent on several officers, at that time, to give an account of the past year's proceedings in their respective departments, and by the circumstance that members of the Society, in exhaustive memoirs, have forestalled any dissertation on some subjects that would naturally be chosen as themes for congratulation and encouragement in a discourse at the threshold of a new year of our corporate existence, when, if anything is to be said, it should be especially that which tends most to encourage further effort.

I refer for examples of these essays to the admirable résumé of the details of the career of this Society, by the Rev. Mr. Slafter, in his discourse on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its incorporation (in the appendix to which he has given us a minute history of the title to the premises we occupy, and an account of the raising of the fund which enabled us to become the owners of this

building), and to the accurate history of the New England Historical and Genealogical Register up to the year 1876, by Colonel Hoyt.

I have intimated that annual reports are made by certain of our officers in conformity to usage only. By this I mean that I know of no by-law expressly requiring such reports, except in the case of the Treasurer, and the Library Committee; yet we could ill afford to dispense with the interesting and instructive annual statements of the Librarian, the Corresponding Secretary, the Committee on Publication, the Committee on English Research, the Committee on Memorials, the Committee on Essays and Papers, and the Historiographer, who is not only our necrologist and biographer, but the mentor whose never-failing lists of deaths regularly remind us of the steady approach of the inexorable summoner, who, sooner or later, shall call each one of us out of life into history.

As the omission of these reports would deprive our annual meetings of their chief interest, so it would be unpardonable in me to attempt to anticipate them. I shall therefore do nothing to abate the intensity of your desire to know what the authors of these reports may have to impart to you.

Still, I may be permitted without trespassing upon the special province of another, to call your attention to certain encouraging facts in our career. That we are now a corporation of nearly eight hundred members, and that our property, real and personal, exceeds in value \$113,000, exclusive of our library (which has never been officially appraised, to my knowledge), are sufficient grounds for satisfaction and exultation, and, when we compare our present condition with our humble beginnings, they are indications not less gratifying of future growth and prosperity.

Of this property about *\$70,000 are invested for various objects, designated either by the donors or by the vote of the Society—\$15,717.74 only of this amount being for the general expenses of the Society.

The income derived, in 1876, from this general fund was but \$1,047.92, to which must be added about as much more received as assessments and admission fees from members, to complete the total current income for that year for defraying all charges for keeping the building clean and in repair, for warming and lighting the halls, and for printing, stationery, postage and other minor

* By last year's statement \$69,831.41.

incidental expenses, besides making up to the Librarian whatever the income of the Librarian-fund falls short of his salary.

This statement of our financial condition is in itself an appeal to all who are interested in the objects for the promotion of which this Society was founded, and who are able to contribute anything, to aid in increasing the general fund.

Without specifying other growing expenses I feel bound to bring to your notice, what you are perhaps already aware of, that the rapid increase of the library and the cost of extra attendance which will inevitably be required by the increasing number of those who avail themselves of our unrivalled collection of books on genealogy, heraldry and local history, demand that the needs of the Society in this direction receive our immediate and earnest attention.

For keeping the library up to a proper standard our sole certain dependence is the income of the funds set apart for the purchase of new books, the gross amount of which, ordinarily, is less than five hundred and fifty dollars.

The increased usefulness of our Society since we began to occupy this building cannot perhaps be better evinced than by comparing the present size of our library with the Librarian's report for 1871. Then the number of bound volumes on our shelves was 8,653, and of pamphlets 26,943. By the last annual report the number of bound volumes had grown to 22,967, besides 65,945 pamphlets; and these numbers have been increased during the past year, as will appear by the report of the Librarian, to which you will listen presently.

This naturally leads to a consideration of what is being done to procure ampler space for our books without encroaching upon the room necessarily devoted to other uses.

The subject of applying the Building-fund to the purpose for which it was contributed has been carefully considered by the Board of Directors, and I think I am not exceeding my authority when I assure you that the committee of the Board, who have the immediate charge of that business, have faithfully improved every opportunity to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to how the money may be best employed to accomplish the object in view. Estimates have been made, and various suggestions have been entertained and discussed, and in short the whole subject so thoroughly examined in all its aspects up to a certain point,—at which, for the

present, it seems wise to stop—that I feel sure, when the board shall have reached a final determination, their judgment will not fail to meet your approval.

I deem it my duty to renew the appeal made by my predecessor in his posthumous address, and repeated by me on a former occasion, for the establishment of a fund for European Research. No one thing, I repeat, in the whole career of this Society has reflected more credit upon the enterprise of its managers, and been fruitful of results more brilliant and startling and more full of promise to the historian and the genealogist, than the discoveries which have been made in England by Mr. Waters. All thanks to the committee by whose exertions we have been able to obtain this foretaste of greater things to come! When we consider that these researches tend to throw light upon the settlement of all the old colonies of this Union, and that if extended to the Continent, as they may and ought to be, and brought down to a comparatively recent period, they may prove of personal interest to at least four-fifths of the white population, not only of this nation, but of the people of European origin in both South and North America, it would seem that a sum not exceeding one mill per head for the white inhabitants of these United States might easily be raised to put this enterprise upon a permanent basis. This is a subject which should be treated by all students of American history as of paramount interest; and since this Society makes no claim to precedence in the apportionment of the honors of any discovery that our associate has made or may make in his researches, we have a right to expect the cordial coöperation of other societies, in our effort to keep him constantly employed in the work in which he has made such gratifying progress.

I scarcely need to repeat here the disclaimer heretofore made of any intention on the part of this Society to guaranty the result of special searches made or promised by any of its members. No authority has ever been given by the Society for such an undertaking, and we should not, corporately, be held accountable for any such promise or agreement. Those who contribute to the fund for research should understand that, while this Society will rejoice with them over every new fact discovered which may be of service to them in their special lines of inquiry, and will cheerfully and gratuitously impart to them all the information of this nature that it receives, it expects of those who join in contributing to aid the

systematic gleaning in which Mr. Waters is engaged, the subordination of all claims for immediate attention to their particular wants to the broader and principal purpose, which, if steadfastly pursued, will, in the end, produce results most satisfactory and conclusive even to those whose interest is confined to a single pedigree, or a single historical fact.

Closely allied to this enterprise and admirably supplementing it, particularly for historical purposes, is Mr. Stevens's grand scheme to prepare, under the auspices of the Federal Government, a complete descriptive catalogue, with appropriate indexes, of all papers relating to America in the various archives and accessible collections of Europe.

Last year, several of our members were among those who were most urgent and active in moving Congress to appropriate a sum sufficient to secure the completion of Mr. Stevens's work, which had also the cordial approval of this Society in its corporate capacity. But although leading scholars and historical societies throughout the Union united in urging the passage of a bill which was proposed and earnestly recommended by the Secretary of State, and which passed the Senate, the measure was lost in the House. It is understood that an effort will be made to renew the application to Congress for an appropriation, perhaps, this winter. If so, I am sure it will have your approval, and that you will be ready to sign any proper petition or memorial recommending the passage of such a bill or resolve. If this measure succeeds, the study of our national diplomacy, and our foreign relations during the colonial period will no longer be the exclusive field of men of great wealth and of high repute abroad, but will be open to hundreds of eager and competent students whose moderate means oblige them in some instances to alternate their studies with the pursuit of professional, mercantile or mechanical business.

Of the publications connected with our Society, the Memorials of Deceased Members are so provided for that while they are sure to be continued, the increase of the number of subscribers will hasten the appearance of the volumes, by increasing the moderate amount of income derived from the fund devoted to that purpose. My predecessor has recommended this work as worthy of your patronage, and I heartily second his appeal to you to aid in bringing forward this collection of memoirs of those with whom we have been pleas-

antly associated, as readily as we would wish our friends to aid in continuing the work in remembrance of us when our faces shall no more be seen nor our voices heard.

The New England Historical and Genealogical Register, which has completed its forty-first volume, has peculiar claims upon your pride and your purse. It is now as indispensable to a complete library in New England as was ever the Gentleman's Magazine in Old England. The increase of public libraries throughout New England must inevitably enlarge the demand for this unrivalled storehouse of historical and genealogical information, and I know of no serial publication more likely to reward the buyer as a pecuniary investment than this. So that if for any reason you should think of retrenching in your expenditure for books, let this be the last to be given up, and if you have not already subscribed, I would advise you to set about collecting a complete set as soon as you feel you can afford to, and, in the mean time, to begin to take the current numbers.

Representatives of historical societies have met during the past year to celebrate historic events, on several occasions. These meetings I have not been privileged to attend, and I can add nothing to what you have learned about these celebrations from other sources. I have to report one memorable exception, however,—a gathering at Portland on the 10th of June last,—at which, as your representative, I saw many of the brightest minds of our sister state of Maine, uniting to celebrate the eighty-fifth anniversary of the birth of Hon. James W. Bradbury, president of the Maine Historical Society. This delightful reunion passed off in a manner well calculated to touch the heart of the venerable man whom they had met to honor, and who responded with a vivacity and interest hardly to be expected in one so far advanced in years.

In the course of the evening one of our associates modestly produced and exhibited the plans and elevations of an elegant brick building, to cost about \$100,000, which he tendered as a free gift for the use of the Maine Historical Society and the Portland Public Library. I felt no little pride that this generous gift came from a member of this Society, and while warmly expressing my sincere satisfaction at the good fortune of the friends about me, I could not repress the wish that JAMES PHINNEY BAXTER, through whose bounty the Maine Historical Society was about to settle in a permanent and

commodious habitation of its own, did not live nearer Boston, where he might work we know not what wonders among the generously disposed of our community who seldom fail to respond to the appeals, and to imitate the example, of such bountiful givers.

I have already asked you to consider the propriety of celebrating the centennial anniversary of the vote, in the Massachusetts Convention called to ratify the National Constitution, by which this State became a constituent member of the Federal Union. At the meeting of the Board of Directors yesterday it was decided that, as a society, we take appropriate notice of that event, and the Board has laid upon me the burden of preparing and of delivering an address suitable to the occasion. Having shown a willingness to ask the same service of another, I felt that I ought not to shrink when it was demanded of me, and with many misgivings as to my ability to satisfy either you or myself in the short time intervening between now and the 6th of February, which is the anniversary of the day when the vote was passed, I have undertaken to do what I can to refresh your memory regarding the greatest event in our state history between the time when the Legislature of Massachusetts resolved itself into a Provincial Congress, at Salem in October, 1774, and the uprising of her people to put down the treason of 1861.

I take occasion here to remind you of the memorial services in honor of my distinguished predecessor which it is proposed to hold on the 18th of this month in Horticultural Hall. The Rev. Andrew P. Peabody, D.D., LL.D., has consented to deliver the memorial discourse, and the members of other organizations to which the deceased belonged are to be formally asked to attend. You are requested to let no other business prevent your being present in company with any of your friends who feel desirous to listen to the address.

Having thus briefly adverted to the topics which seem to require official mention on this occasion, I shall further trespass upon your time by offering some suggestions more especially intended for the younger members of the Society.

I cannot allow to pass unimproved so favorable an opportunity for urging upon you the importance of cultivating and encouraging habits of minute inquiry and independent thought in historical investigations. More than thirty years' experience and observation in the line of historical work, with extraordinary facilities for com-

paring the treatment by historians of matters concerning the colonization and progress of our own State with the original sources of information, justifies me in expressing the opinion that it is not so necessary that we compass the whole field of history as that we attain accuracy in what we attempt to acquire or profess to know.

The special business of an historical society is to collect materials and to arrange and preserve them conveniently for use, either in print or in well catalogued archives. In the performance of this work we should learn to regard every original record as sacred, and if not clearly useful for present purposes, yet, possibly, as of the utmost service in settling some point not yet disputed or foreseen, and, in compiling history, to subject all preconceptions to the authority of these established records.

This habit prepares the way for the ready correction of old errors, and tends to invest with new charms and a deeper interest events which, as detailed in the narratives of careless or prejudiced historians, are stale and unprofitable. In short our aim should be, to understand precisely what history *should* and *does* teach us.

By keeping ever true to this high aim we shall become less and less tolerant of many errors of history, resting on secondary authority, or no authority at all, and which seem obstinately rooted in the public mind, and hence perhaps are compliantly allowed by historians and historical bodies to pass unchallenged, but which sometimes tend to foster great evils and lead to indifference to, or approval of, public outrages, and which also often libel and degrade historical personages who are not justly chargeable with the sentiments inferentially or expressly ascribed to them in these perversions of history.

The late venerable Abiel Holmes, in a letter which is preserved in the New England Historical and Genealogical Register, written in 1822, concerning an ancient chair said to have been brought to this country by the Mather family, and presented, I believe, to the American Antiquarian Society, said, respecting such relics, "the tradition or history of them ought to be exact. *Nothing offends a chronologist like an anachronism.*" If the good Doctor was not mistaken as to the sensitiveness of those who prepare tables of past and contemporaneous events, we might well suppose, if we took notice of the acquiescence of historians and historical societies in all sorts of anachronisms and other absurdities publicly pro-

claimed and celebrated as undoubted historical facts, that chronology is one of the lost arts or that it has no connection with history.

These errors are not confined to current popular periodicals, but fill attractive pages in our school-books. Not long ago a well-known text-book of history for schools was widely commended because, in the illustration which adorned its pages, the Puritans were pictured with heads "*filed*," after the pattern of the modern pugilist, notwithstanding that in not one of the contemporary portraits of Puritans, whether here or in England, unless, indeed, he were bald, is the subject represented without what we should call long hair. The error probably arose from a misunderstanding of the meaning of the word "Roundhead," the etymology of which even Rapin, that laborious and ingenious historian, who was nearly contemporary with the last of the Commonwealth men, found too obscure for the basis of a positive opinion as to its first and true meaning.

Again, one of our popular lecturers, who illustrates his numerous descriptive essays on travel and history by the aid of the stereopticon, exhibits, among other glaring anachronisms, as the likeness of Robert Devereux,—Elizabeth's unfortunate favorite Earl of Essex, a head in a curled periwig,—a questionable ornament which was not invented until long after his death, and not introduced into England until sixty years after that event. The newspaper critics praise the show, and the audiences seem to enjoy it, but how they derive any real benefit from this confusion of ideas, it is hard to conceive.

Some months ago a leading daily newspaper in this city, to prove a point in a controversy which called for the exhibition of only undisputed facts, printed, in an editorial paragraph, with approving comments, and apparently without the least suspicion of the weakness of an argument founded upon such a flimsy basis, a letter signed "Crispus Attucks," in which the writer attributes his death to the murderous agency of Thomas Hutchinson, to whom the letter is addressed. What is still more strange is that this letter, carrying the evidence of its spuriousness on its face, was copied from Mr. Williams's comprehensive History of the Negro Race in America. The historian, however, gives his authority, which is nothing more than a political squib, under this pseudonyme, found among the papers of John Adams and dated July 19, 1773—more than three

years after the Massacre. It was undoubtedly written by Adams with the intention of offering it to some newspaper, though I am not aware that it appeared in print before Mr. Charles Francis Adams published the works of his grandfather.*

Other circumstances in the supposed career of Crispus Attucks rest upon assumed data; for instance, that he was a fugitive slave,—and, by a still more glaring inversion of facts and inferences, and ill-concealed juggling, he is represented as being impelled by a sense of the injustice of his bondage to join the party of his oppressors to wreak vengeance on a body of soldiers against whom one of the charges made by the patriot party was, that they were harboring fugitive slaves and enticing them away from their masters, under the promise of absolute freedom! It is not even shown that Attucks, who belonged to a vessel recently arrived in the harbor, had ever been in Boston before the day of his death, and the strongest support of the theory that he had been a slave is that a mulatto, with nearly the same Christian name, but owned by one Brown, had been advertised twenty years before as a runaway. Naturally, we should suppose that the fugitive would have borne the surname of his master; and it has not been shown that the name Crispas or Crispus was not very commonly applied to Indians and negroes.

I mention these things not to invite or prolong a controversy which cannot be satisfactorily ended without further definite facts, but as illustrating the facility with which men sometimes find support for conclusions based on slight coincidences which they would regard as of no weight whatever if adduced in argument by an opponent.

Anachronisms are not only overlooked by those who have made no special study of history, but sometimes are to be found in the books of writers who are regarded as authorities, and quite as often escape the notice of those whose business it is to collect and preserve the materials of history. For instance, in Pilgrim Hall at Plymouth I saw, when I was last there (and I suppose it is still shown to visitors—since I saw it there years before), an engraved likeness of Benjamin Franklin, as a young man, which was claimed to be the portrait of Roger Williams, and bore his name, put upon it by the engraver. Being as much amused as if I had been shown a picture of St. Paul in a bob-wig and velvet breeches, I pointed out to the

* The Life and Works of John Adams, Vol. II. p. 322.

courteous attendant the anachronisms in dress, and its similarity to a well-known portrait of Franklin, but found I had made a mistake, and wounded, without convincing, one who had taken great pains to explain to me all the curiosities of the place.

Later, I learned that others had noticed the same incongruities and the same resemblance; and my friend Dr. Charles Deane of Cambridge, to whom I casually mentioned my experience at Plymouth, called my attention to the use of the same portrait on the engraved title-page of the first edition of the *Life of Roger Williams*, in Sparks's *American Biography*, printed more than forty years ago, which if I had ever noticed it I had quite forgotten. Dr. Deane also lent me a portfolio of engravings, etc., in his possession illustrating the history of this remarkable transformation, tracing the fraud to its source, and showing that other respectable writers of history had been deceived by it.*

A similar anachronism appears in the portrait claimed to be of the Earl of Bellomont prefixed to Mr. DePeyster's pamphlet memoir of that nobleman. In this portrait this early governor of Massachusetts appears arrayed in a comparatively modern uniform, and wearing what seems to be the emblem of a Russian military order, or order of nobility. This picture has found its way, without challenge, into the *Memorial History of Boston*, and moreover, disfigures one of the best, most accurate and most laborious historical monographs ever issued from the press, in Boston. When the real portrait of Richard Coote shall appear, it will, I venture to predict, show a head wearing the flowing wig of the period, and a body probably cased in armor, or at least wearing the gorget and breast-plate. But it is wiser not to surmise, but to wait until some one with the enterprise and industry of our associate Mr. Whitmore, who was so successful in securing for us the veritable effigies of Sir Edmund Andros, following up a trail, discovers to us the genuine likeness of the second governor under the Province charter.

* The curious may learn more concerning this and similar frauds by consulting the *Historical Magazine* for December, 1868, in which a former president of this Society, Mr. Samuel G. Drake, gives an entertaining account of some of his experiences with historical portraits.—P. 269.

Since this address was delivered, I have been informed by Hon. William T. Davis, of Plymouth, that this portrait has been removed, and that the erroneous labelling of certain curiosities—as, for instance, the teapot “brought over in the Mayflower,” a generation, at least, before tea is known to have been used as a beverage in England—has been corrected.

All these instances are, doubtless, comparatively unimportant, but the mention of them may serve to put you on your guard against a too ready acceptance of loose traditions, or the printed statements of writers who, like the knight of *La Mancha*, set out for a tilt in defence of a mistress whose existence, as well as whose virtues and attractions, may be purely imaginary.

Let no weak desire to conciliate a popular frenzy,—no deference to the worship of the specious idols of vulgar rumor or uncertain tradition constrain us to silence when it becomes our duty to speak. On the contrary, let us, without claiming any special genius or peculiar astuteness, be ever ready to strip from the truths of history the gaudy trappings and the misleading disguises which have been fastened upon them, and to dispel the false glamour thrown around them by ignorance, by imagination, by prejudice or wilful perversion, and hold the faithful pictures up to view to shock with their deformity, or touch and charm by the revelation of beauties too long concealed and forgotten. So shall we win and hold the respect, and deserve the confidence of the public; and then we may expect to be asked to express our judgment beforehand on the expediency of any public measure depending upon a question of historical importance which admits of doubt or dispute, and to have our opinions respected.

Fortunately the tendency of modern historical investigation is towards the critical method; indeed, the sentiment that the historian's labors are nothing if not critical, is growing, everywhere. It is gratifying to observe how, in obedience to this sentiment, recent writers have suppressed narratives which a few years ago were the favorite themes which historians held out to the artist and the poet.

The old repulsive pictures of the Puritan,—the rabble of the Long and the Rump Parliaments,—the treasonable ambition of Cromwell, wading "through slaughter to a throne,"—are gone with the inventions of Weems respecting the early career of Washington, and the mendacious though romantic narratives of Captain John Smith's adventures with *Tragabigzanda* and *Pocahontas*. We are more and more disposed to wonder that these corrections were not made sooner; and we find it impossible to reconcile with the sagacity and honesty of Hume his absurd account of the Sussex jurymen whose ridiculous names have been so long paraded as a part of his-

tory, when we reflect that he had the same means that we have of perceiving that these persons, of full age in the days of the Commonwealth, did not receive their names by an ordinance of Parliament or by the decree of a Puritan synod or assembly, but must have been duly christened in the Church of England as early perhaps as in the reign of Elizabeth,—certainly not later than the beginning of the reign of Charles the First.

A parallel illustration of the comparative value of the results of the modern critical method of studying history, which involves the careful examination and comparison of minutiae, and the old method of brilliantly generalizing, may be found in the recent progress of natural science. The author of the *Zoönomia* speculated on the subject of the creation until he reached conclusions not wholly at variance with the modern theory of evolution, but it was reserved for his grandson to establish the law by the most humble, careful and indefatigable labor in accumulating, arranging and comparing details. Erasmus Darwin attained the rank of an inferior poet of a fine prophetic instinct, and was reputed a fair naturalist for his time; but Charles Darwin, without bluster or pretence, has done for natural science what Newton did for celestial mechanics, and stands alone on a pedestal which only one man could reach and occupy. Let this be an incentive to us to "learn to labor and to wait."

Here let me quit this theme, on which I trust I have not tried your patience, and conclude with a few words on the comparative importance of historical studies.

It is sometimes plausibly asked, "What is the use of plodding historical research?" and, doubtless, it is easy to draw amusing pictures, not always caricatures, of the collectors of old pamphlets, the scribblers on old almanacs, the chroniclers of "small beer," and the compilers of "endless genealogies" and "profane and old wives' fables;" but if we apply the same kind of criticism to any other branch of inquiry or of labor, we can reduce it to absurdity with even greater ease.

What, for instance, are the special advantages of wealth to him who, however rich, gets only food, clothing and shelter? What preëminence has either of the professions, or either of the mercantile or mechanical pursuits? Whether at the bar or on the bench, the lawyer only labors to settle the interminable dispute between

John Doe and Richard Roe, which is renewed by other counsel in the next generation. The physician cannot avert the final dissolution of all the organs of the body, and the clergyman can only minister to the spiritual wants of a flock which will soon be succeeded by strangers under a new shepherd, or offer inadequate consolation to hearts crushed with a burden that will cease to oppress only with the final throb. The ships of the merchant vanish from the sea in a little while, and his name lives only in connection with some act of munificence, or in the vague tradition of his success. The toiling millions build, repair and rebuild, toil, endure and pass into oblivion. Even of statesmen and other magnates it may be said, as Cowper said of the fame of some of his contemporaries when comparing it to the names on the cinders of his burning paper—

“Those twinkling tiny lustres of the land
Drop one by one from Fame's neglecting hand;
Lethæan gulfs receive them as they fall,
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.”

In a very short time all these—and their works—exist only at the will of the historian. If he choose to remember them, and to rehabilitate their exuvie and scattered bones, they may, indeed, survive in the pages of the law reporter, the medical retrospect, the theological review, the biographer, the annalist, or the unobtrusive diarist or genealogist,—for all of these are, in some proper sense, writers or repositories of history. But what a tribute to the historian's office is implied in this incontrovertible statement!

True, there is the contingency, which though remote seems inevitable, that all things must fade and disappear—that “the sun itself shall die,” and all animate and inanimate creation be plunged into the realm of “chaos and old night,” only to emerge from the abyss in comets and meteoric showers to form parts of a new system. If man had no hope of immortality he might perhaps sink supinely down before this prospect, and cry, “Vanity of vanities! what are we living for? and who shall say that one object is more to be desired than another? Why should we labor to retrieve, for a little while, aught from the inevitable destruction which awaits all?”

Happily our God-given nature revolts at this melancholy picture of the end of all life, progress and hope! Trusting the Infinite Wisdom which called us into existence and endued us with a longing to know all that is knowable around us and behind us;

and, cheered by an implicit and invincible faith, we take up the duties of life with ever renewed confidence and zeal, assured that we are wisely employed in tracing the designs and coöperating in the labors of One who never works aimlessly or capriciously. So, to gratify an insatiable desire to know what man has learned and accomplished in the past, we find profit and delight in exploring those records which contain the surest and safest guides for our own conduct, and the only certain indications of danger to be avoided by men and nations.

Thus let us live on in hope, *pursuing the most real of all earthly objects*, until the day comes to each of us that shall test the reality of our inborn aspirations for a better future—a life to continue without end, after all human history shall have been written, and,—

“ — like the baseless fabric of ” a “vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.”

Phillips Library



3 6234 00055878 6

